

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 361 362

TM 020 429

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 TITLE The Centrality of Critical Thinking in Educating for Diversity.  
 PUB DATE Aug 93  
 NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual International Conference on Critical Thinking and Educational Reform (13th, Sonoma, CA, August 1-4, 1993) and at the Annual Conference on Critical Thinking as an Educational Ideal (5th, Montclair, NJ, October 22, 1992).  
 PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)  
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
 DESCRIPTORS Acculturation; Adult Education; \*Critical Thinking; Cultural Awareness; Cultural Differences; \*Cultural Pluralism; \*Educational Practices; Elementary Secondary Education; Futures (of Society); Higher Education; Interpersonal Competence; Models; \*Multicultural Education; Racial Differences; Self Concept; \*Teacher Role; Teaching Methods; \*Vocational Education  
 IDENTIFIERS Cultural Competence

## ABSTRACT

The cultural crisis in the United States poses a challenge for educators to educate for diversity. According to T. Cross (1988), there are six stages of cultural competence that allow effective cross-cultural functioning. Educators must encourage the movement from the first stage of seeking to destroy another culture to the final advanced cultural competence that values differences throughout society. The most common educational approaches to diversity education correspond roughly to the stages of cultural competence. A deficit/assimilation approach attempts to alter those presumed to be deficient due to differences. The multicultural perspective represents more advanced steps on the continuum of precompetence and basic cultural competence, and the empowerment/anti-bias approach uses the forms and processes of education to reconstruct rather than reproduce relationships of domination. The following implications for educational practice are highlighted: (1) aligning process and practice with purpose; (2) modeling critical thinking; (3) encouraging dialog and exploration of alternatives; (4) discovering self and others; (5) challenging assumptions and beliefs through critical discourse and self-reflection; and (6) building skills and knowledge. Workplace education has a central role in educating for diversity, which is the most pivotal and crucial undertaking of the educational system. (SLD)

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THE CENTRALITY OF CRITICAL THINKING  
IN  
EDUCATING FOR DIVERSITY

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Presented at the  
Fifth Annual Conference  
"Critical Thinking as an Educational Ideal"  
Sponsored by the Institute for Critical Thinking  
Montclair State College  
October 22, 1992

Submitted for the  
13th Annual International Conference  
on  
Critical Thinking and Educational Reform  
Sonoma State University  
August 1-4, 1993

## THE CENTRALITY OF CRITICAL THINKING IN EDUCATING FOR DIVERSITY

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"Can we all get along?" (Rodney King, 1992). Amid the whirlpool of painful and disgraceful events that drew the world's attention to Los Angeles, California in the spring of 1992, these resounding words captured the essence of the cultural crisis in our country. Although the heterogeneous population of the United States makes pluralism a necessity, we have not always regarded diversity as an asset. A self-fulfilling prophecy too often has turned diversity into an unrelenting and intractable problem. Yet, ironically, the very diversity that is seen as a liability is potentially our greatest strength.

The contemporary United States has become the ultimate testing ground for pluralism. All systems and institutions--political, economic, educational and social--will be tested. And if "getting along" is something US society has not yet learned, or not yet learned well enough, then it is a challenge for all educators, in no matter what setting, to begin (or continue) educating for diversity--the embracing, celebrating, and synergistic utilization of differences among human beings.

## The Path of Learning

According to Terry Cross (1988), there are six stages of cultural competence, "a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency or professional that enable that system, agency, or professional to work effectively in cross-cultural situations" (p.1). At the most primitive, least conscious level, persons and organizations seek to destroy a different culture out of fear and the belief that the other culture is inferior to their own. Examples in recent history are the "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the genocide perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, the Chinese in Tibet, the Holocaust in Germany and the attempted destruction of the Native American culture by the United States government.

At the next point on the continuum is cultural incapacity, a biased and paternal posture toward "inferior" peoples. Stereotypes and discriminatory practices characterize this stage of development. Those at the midpoint of this continuum are culturally blind in that they see their own values as universally applicable to all people. This ethnocentric view seeks to assimilate differences and ignore the strengths of different cultures. This stage also tends to blame and rescue those who are different.

Cultural pre-competence is marked by an awakening to one's own biases and prejudice in understanding and relating to different others. Cultural precompetents begin to realize their weaknesses in responding to others and make a commitment to

improving their attitudes and practices. The culturally competent are characterized by acceptance and respect for difference, self-monitoring regarding cultural bias and sensitivity to the dynamics of difference in interpersonal, group or organizational interactions. At the most positive end of the spectrum is advanced cultural competence, an advocacy and educative role aimed toward cultural competence and valuing of differences throughout society. At this point, one becomes an instrument for transformative change in perspective and in organizational structure.

### Educational Approaches

The most common educational approaches to diversity education correspond roughly to the stages of cultural competence. Amy Rose (1992) has identified five types of education for diversity. The first--teaching the culturally diverse--is based on a deficiency/assimilation assumption. Differences are seen as better or worse, not merely different and the "worse" are therefore to be taught the dominant "better" culture and assimilated into it. A second category--human relations--attempts to eliminate conflict by increasing tolerance of differences through dialogue, discussion and understanding other points of view. A third concept in educating for diversity is ethnic studies in which the contributions of various cultures are studied with the aim of building a sense of identity, esteem and respect for these cultures. A fourth approach is called multicultural education

because it promotes both cultural pluralism and social equality. The fifth perspective extends multicultural education by explicitly advocating social reconstruction. The goal is to extend awareness of cultural issues to include class and power relations so that learners will challenge and transform organizations and institutions of society. This approach has been called the Empowerment/Anti-Bias perspective.

To simplify and summarize, the major approaches to diversity education are rooted in perspectives that correspond to the levels of cultural competence. Deficit/Assimilation attempts to "fix" those presumed to be deficient due to their differences and coincides with the cultural incapacity and cultural blindness points on the cultural continuum. The multicultural perspective is based on cross-cultural understanding, respect for and valuing of differences. Pre-competence and basic cultural competence are represented within this educational perspective. Advanced competence gives rise to the Empowerment/Anti-Bias approach which uses the forms and processes of education itself to challenge and "reconstruct rather than reproduce relationships of domination" (Hemphill, 1992, p.10). Critical thinking in the deepest sense is embodied in this approach.

### Critical Education for Diversity

The overarching purpose of educating for diversity, both in and out of the workplace, is to facilitate movement on the cultural competence continuum toward advanced cultural

competence and to prepare learners to challenge and restructure institutions of society to become more inclusive, just, and democratic. Critical thinking also challenges the status quo by the very nature of its questioning posture toward knowledge and behavior, i.e., toward what is known and what is done. Thus, the assumptions upon which the Empowerment/Anti-Bias approach is based are congruent with the aims of critical thinking in its most profound meaning and might therefore be termed "critical education for diversity".

It should be noted that this approach might also encompass many of the methods used in the human relations and multicultural approaches because the three are rooted in shared beliefs and values. For instance, listening skills and dialogue are key elements used by all three approaches. Critical education for diversity, however, goes beyond human relations and multicultural education by extending awareness of relationships of power and dominance to include at least the possibility of collective social action for change.

### Implications for Practice

Certain processes and practices, therefore, are the core of critical education for diversity. The most significant of these are: 1-Aligning process and practice with purpose (creating structures and climate that support goals); 2-Modeling the spirit and skills of critical thinking (openness to inquiry and respect for other points of view, for example); 3-Encouraging dialogue and exploration of alternatives and consequences of

actions; 4-Discovering self and others; 5-Challenging assumptions and beliefs through critical discourse and critical self reflection; and 6-Building skills and knowledge (interpersonal communications, system analysis and change, for example).

### Aligning and Modeling

Perhaps the most important focus of the educators' attention is making certain that the educational environment--its structure and climate--is itself a microcosm that reflects the objectives and underlying values of critical education for diversity. This holds for workplace learning programs as well as classrooms in schools, colleges and universities. The metalearning of the educational process is a powerful dynamic and must be consistent with the message or content of the curriculum.

For instance, an authoritarian structure in which professors lecture or trainers transmit corporate policy is more likely to teach the legitimacy of one view rather than the valuing of multiple perspectives. Similarly, an educator cannot advocate openness to inquiry unless she or he models respect and acceptance of learners' thoughts, ideas and feelings.

### Dialogue and Discovery

Dialogue is not simply discussion. It is an emotional-intellectual engagement with another person in order to bring about understanding and the creation of a new perspective. It seeks to discover the essence of the self and



of others, as well as the consequences of biased beliefs and actions. Learners can discover not only commonalities with one another but also the painful effects of insensitivity and intolerance. By sharing alternative viewpoints and listening to usually silent voices, learners experience a more authentic, more holistic environment than is usual in many workplaces or classrooms. There is evidence that such an atmosphere leads to better problem-solving and decision-making due to a higher level of critical analysis made possible by the variety of perspectives on issues (Nemeth, 1986).

### Challenging and Building

Critical self-reflection and critical discourse means that learners surface, examine, and challenge the validity of their own beliefs, assumptions, and actions. In the workplace, erroneous, obsolete, or inadequate assumptions underlie dysfunctional systems and operating practices. When these become apparent, it is possible to explore new options and to make alternative choices for system change.

For example, a workshop in critical education for diversity may focus on the issue of competition and aggressiveness in the business unit. In a climate that is at once supportive yet challenging, learners would share their views about competition, cooperation, aggressiveness and receptivity. They would be encouraged to hear divergent, unconventional ideas and to challenge their own beliefs as well as those expressed by others.

Through the processes of dialogue, discourse, and

discovery, learners may realize that the organization's culture inhibits and disallows all but the narrowest spectrum of behavior, and that a highly aggressive organizational culture results in unintended negative consequences such as the stifling of openness and cooperation and the compromising of team effectiveness. Such insights are a step toward the transformation of organizational systems and culture to become more inclusive of the styles and behaviors of previously excluded persons and groups.

### **The Central Role of Workplace Education for Diversity**

If there is one arena in which the valuing and management of diversity is prerequisite for personal and organizational health, and one in which a great deal of the time, attention and effort of human beings is devoted, that arena is the workplace. This creates both an opportunity and a responsibility to educate for diversity, both in preparing for employment and in staff development programs in the workplace.

There is now a convergence of economic and ethical imperatives which places the management of diversity in the workplace at the core of competitiveness. Not only do organizations have an ethical responsibility to empower employees to develop and use their talents, there is also a competitive advantage to encouraging and facilitating their best contributions toward the success of the enterprise.

As the 21st century approaches, all indications are that the composition of the workforce will be more female, older, and

more racially and ethnically mixed. The most competitive organizations will be those which regard such diversity as an asset rather than a liability and will make serious, sincere, long term efforts to manage diversity through workplace education, organizational structures and managerial policies and practices (Thomas, 1990). Conversely, "organizations that fail to make appropriate changes to successfully use and keep employees from different backgrounds can expect to suffer a significant competitive disadvantage compared to those that do" (Cox & Blake, 1991, p.47).

Cox and Blake (1991) identify six areas of business performance in which the effective management of a diverse workforce can create a competitive advantage. These areas of impact are: 1-cost, 2-resource acquisition, 3-marketing, 4-creativity, 5-problem solving and 6-system flexibility. For example, the failure to manage women and racioethnic minorities translates into unnecessary costs, such as turnover and absenteeism for working mothers. Furthermore, attracting and retaining excellent employees from various demographic groups will depend on how favorable the company's reputation for managing diversity has come to be viewed. As the labor pool shrinks and changes composition, this edge will become increasingly important.

Marketing in the global community must also become sensitive to cultural diversification. Here, the insight of employees from various cultures can be an invaluable aid in targeting products and services for both domestic and international markets. Heterogeneity can also improve the

problem-solving and creativity of organizations by providing multiple perspectives and lessening conformity to norms of the past. By fostering the contributions of women and minorities, system flexibility is increased, thereby allowing for more openness to new ideas and a more proactive stance toward change.

In order to reap such rewards, however, organizations will have to engage in several spheres of activity aimed at changing the organizational structure to value differences, involve more women and minorities at higher levels of management and establish bias-free policies and systems. Such profound organizational change requires generative learning, ostensibly the area of expertise of the adult educator and the human resource development (HRD) professional. It would, therefore, be difficult to overstate the importance of the role of workplace education and organization development in helping the workplace to become a "learning organization," as described by Peter Senge (1990).

### Learning Organizations

A healthy economy and business community cannot be achieved in the absence of organizations characterized by critical thinking and the effective management of diversity. Certain elements are essential for these learning organizations. They are 1-the capacity for clarification, 2-the capacity for conversation or dialogue, 3-the capacity for putting pieces together to see the whole, 4-the capacity to reflect critically on "internal pictures of the world to see how they shape our actions", and 5-the capacity to imagine what is desirable to

create (Senge, 1991). These five "disciplines", comprise the necessary components for a thriving enterprise and are also the cornerstones of critical thinking and the foundation for diversity management.

Senge believes that the real generative point in becoming a learning organization occurs in "small groups of people who support each other, tell the truth to each other and are continually in a mode of inquiry" (1991, p.38). Through this type of authentic dialogue, a new view is discovered, a new voice is created. In other words, in dialogue, different views are expressed and different voices are heard as a means of discovering and creating something that is more inclusive, synergistic, and transcendent. Put another way, it is impossible to manage diversity or to create a learning organization in the absence of the spirit as well as the skills of critical thinking.

### Conclusions

The fact of cultural diversity in the United States and the challenges it poses regarding issues of social justice and equity, economic development, and lifelong learning make critical education for diversity perhaps the most pivotal and crucial undertaking of our educational systems, not only in schools, colleges, and universities, but also and especially in the workplace.

This important effort cannot take place without developing the attitude and skills of critical thinking: a spirit of

inquiry, the willingness to engage in the dialogue of human conversation, to challenge assumptions and beliefs about others who are different, and the interpersonal and problem-solving skills necessary for understanding, valuing and managing differences for the benefit of all.

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